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ABSTRACT

This document contains one of two reports presented at the Governor's National Forum on Youth Employment, May 22-23, 1980. Focusing on the issue of youth employment, this report is divided into seven sections. Section 1 discusses the high national youth unemployment rate. Section 2 describes a variety of factors pertinent to youth unemployment and the characteristics of the teenage labor force. Section 3 explains some of the causes for youth unemployment. The prognosis for the next decade is discussed in section 4. Section 5 presents the urban youth employment perspectives, while section 6 presents the rural youth employment perspectives. Finally, section 7 discusses the following conclusions: (1) the youth population of the 1980s is projected to decline: (2) the causes associated with youth unemployment are diverse and multifaceted: (3) our educational system is rigidly structured and serves as a deterent to an increasing number of young people: and (4) minority, inner city, and rural area youth are the segments of the labor force that will experience the bulk of youth unemployment during the 1980s. (BM)

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Governor's National Forum on Youth Employment

Issues of Youth Employment

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May 22-23, 1980

St. Louis, Missouri

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Introduction

The issue of high youth unemployment rates has generated a great deal of concern throughout our nation since the early 1960's. Results of this concern have been reflected in a variety of employment and training programs designed to successfully alleviate problems of youth unemployment. Although these programs have not appreciably affected youth unemployment rates, they have taught us that unemployment is a problem of great severity for particular segments of the younger population.[1]

Periods of unemployment have often been associated with the youth labor market experience. In January of 1980 the unemployment rate for youth 16 to 24 was 10.1 percent compared with a national rate of 6.2 percent. The rate for those 16 to 19 was even higher, 16.3 percent. For young blacks the rate was 34.6 percent, compared with 14.0 percent for white teenagers.[2] The 1978 unemployment rate for nonwhite teenagers in metropolitan poverty areas was 42.9 percent and 32.4 percent for the same group in nonmetropolitan poverty areas.[3]

Providing employment opportunities for all youth is not the solution to youth unemployment. Human diversity precludes this as a feasible undertaking. Positively effecting a change in the youth unemployment rate demands focusing primary attention of youth programs on those segments of the population having the greatest difficulties in the labor market. Localized, individualized approaches are required to adequately identify and evaluate the target population's needs so programs can be developed to meet these needs. In other words, each community must develop programs that will meet the employment needs of the hard-to-employ.

Youth Labor Force Characteristics

A variety of factors pertinent to youth unemployment relate to characteristics of the teenage labor force.

1. Nearly half of the unemployed teenage population are enrolled in school, and, therefore, seek only part-time employment. Most are not primary breadwinners and live with parents or guardians.

2. Teenagers enter and exit from the labor force more frequently than older groups and are associated with temporary employment. Most of these unemployed teenagers are seeking their first job or new jobs after a short period of unemployment.

3. Many younger persons are simply not interested in establishing stable careers.[4] They tend to flow in and out of the "secondary" labor market (i.e., businesses with low pay; little opportunity for advancement; little training; high turnover). This type of employment meets their need for spending money and, at the same time, affords them a job without personal demands.[5]

4. Although a large percentage of teenagers experience unemployment, when compared with adult unemployment it is usually of shorter duration.[6]

5. When cyclical economic trends create higher adult unemployment, youth unemployment is usually more adversely affected.[7]

6. Statistics show a decline in the youth unemployment rate with age. Table 1 reflects this decrease when comparing age cohorts 16 to 17, 18 to 19, and 20 to 24.

This last point is quite important because it suggests that for most individuals unemployment during the teenage years does not become a critical problem later on. Nevertheless, this does not preclude the fact that youth unemployment is a severe problem. Rather, it indicates a variety of factors may require identification and analysis to provide equitable solutions for those segments of the youth labor force experiencing the greatest difficulty in the employment arena.

Table 1
Unemployment by Age, Seasonally Adjusted

Age	Unemployment Rates		
	January 1979	October 1979	January 1980
16 to 19 years	16.0	16.4	16.3
16 to 17 years	18.6	18.4	19.0
17 to 18 years	13.8	15.0	14.0
20 to 24 years	8.7	9.6	10.1

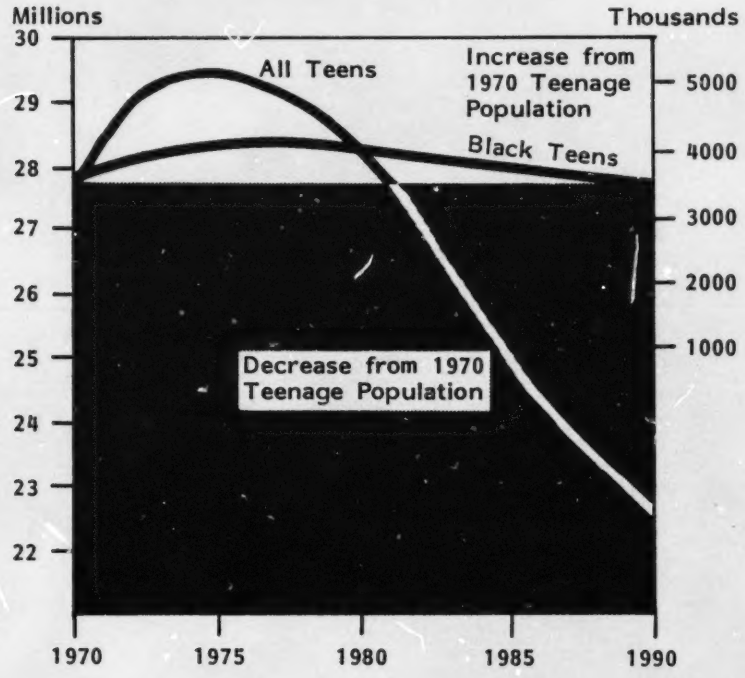
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, NEWS, January, 1980, Table A-6.

Causes for Youth Unemployment

During the 1970's the issue of youth unemployment moved to the pinnacle of public concern. This was natural when considering the fact that since World War II the youth percentage of the total population has increased substantially. As a result of this public concern, numerous causes have been advanced to account for high youth unemployment rates.

Demographic factors - Following World War II, the ensuing baby boom had profound impacts on the supply of youth entering the labor force. In 1947 new births peaked at 3.8 million per year. A second peak from 1958 to 1962 resulted in nearly 4.5 million births per year. The last of this postwar population will pass through their teenage years in 1981. However, the situation for blacks is not the same because their postwar births will peak later and decline slower than for those of whites[8] (Figure 1). This suggests that, although current youth pressure on the labor market will decline during the 1980's, the black youth unemployment rate is unlikely to decline as a result of population increases alone.

Figure 1: Relative Increase of Black and All Teenagers, 1970 - 1990



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, P-25, No. 601, October, 1975.

Although the post war baby boom has been proposed as a major cause for high youth unemployment rates, Osterman (see note 4) points out that the teenage share of total employment more than kept pace with the increased labor supply. He states that between 1954 and 1974 the teenage share of total employment increased from 5.8 to 8.6 percent (48 percent increase) while the proportion of the teenage segment of the population increased from 8.9 to 12.7 percent (42 percent increase). This indicates that the blame for high youth unemployment rates may not in fact be completely the result of demographic changes.

Economic factors - The state of the economy has a direct effect on the rate of youth unemployment. For example, during a recession the youth unemployment rate is higher than normal, not only because of the downturn in economic activity, but also because youth have to compete with unemployed adults who exhibit more experience, a greater number of work related skills, and a more stable attachment to the work force. Additionally, the increasing percentage of women in the labor force, along with the suspected impact of minimum wage laws, creates negative effects on youth unemployment rates.[9]

Similarly, escalation of economic activity can have positive effects on youth unemployment. The Vietnam conflict had a significant impact on the labor force during the late 1960's. It directly increased employment in defense industries, as well as indirectly generating more jobs

in industries that were defense related.[10] Military conflict removed a large portion of participants from the civilian labor force, thus creating a dampening effect on the unemployment rates for those age groups who were directly involved in military activity.

School-to-work transition - The move from the classroom into the labor force is found to be a slow, gradual, and seldom smooth process. Higher rates of youth unemployment are associated with this transition. Participation in entry level jobs with high turnover, minimal training, limited advancement potential, and low job security characterizes the initial stage of the transition.

The majority of teenagers moving into the labor force for the first time face tremendous barriers to successful employment. These youth possess little in the way of job skills and have limited, if any, job experience. Most of their search for employment is trial and error in nature because they lack any significant information about potential career opportunities in the labor market.[11]

As stated previously, most youth make this transition from school to work successfully. Unemployment rates are highest for 16 and 17 year olds and decline significantly by age group thereafter (see Table 1). From the mid teens to age 24, the transition from school to work takes place. It is an experience, the length and success of which varies from individual to individual and is largely marked by uncertainty.[12] Of particular concern are those youth who do not successfully make the transition to work for whatever reason (e.g., lack of available entry level positions, racial barriers, educational barriers, socioeconomic factors, sex discrimination, etc.). This segment of the younger population requires greater attention to obtain their assimilation into the labor force, suggesting the need for employment and training programs specifically targeted at these individuals.

Early work experience and future employability - Young people experiencing negative labor market success in the form of chronic unemployment are more inclined to experience a similar trend as they grow older. Periods spent both out of school and work by youth increase the probability of unemployment later in life. Current employment is highest for those who were employed during their teens. In addition, earnings for those employed as teenagers are higher than those not employed as teenagers.

Contrary to popular belief, research findings on early work experiences indicate that unemployment is not a phase through which all youth successfully pass with no long-term negative effects. A most significant finding is the direct effect early labor market experiences have on future employability and income potential. Periods of early unemployment represent a loss in the development of marketable job skills.[13] These research findings indicate the need for employment and training programs targeted at unemployed and out-of-school youth to provide meaningful work experiences and enhancement of their future employability.

Preferences of employers - An important factor in analyzing the causes of youth unemployment is the reluctance on the part of employers to hire young people under 21 years of age into full-time positions. It is only natural that an employer desires an individual with some degree of experience and job related skills. Since teenage youth are often deficient in both areas, the employer has to provide expensive on-the-job training, thus precipitating hiring workers of prime age

rather than teenagers.[14]

In addition to economic considerations, equally important are the attitudes employers express regarding teenagers. This might be related to the level of educational achievement, since attainment of a high school diploma increases one's chances of obtaining a job.[15] Employers often associate high school graduation with greater maturity and attainment of basic educational skills, and are therefore more willing to hire youth with high school diplomas.

Discrimination and unequal job contacts - Blacks in the youth labor market experience much higher unemployment rates than do their white counterparts. In January, 1980, blacks and other ethnic minorities, ages 16 to 19, experienced an unemployment rate of 34.6 percent, nearly five and one half times the national average, compared with 14.0 percent for whites the same age. Osterman points out that "over half of the unemployment differential between black and white 18-to-28-year-old males could not be explained by difference in education, family background, regional distribution, and the like." He further states that "Discrimination and unequal job contacts are the most important factors that differentiate the job prospects of black youth from those of white."[16] Due to racial bias on the part of employers, few blacks have job contacts available to them through family members in the labor force because older blacks experience similar discrimination.

Whatever the causes for racial discrimination in youth employment, the thrust of future employment and training programs will require paying particular attention to the minority sector of unemployed youth. Targeting attention on this segment of the youth population will be one very important means of dealing with the reality of the structural nature of minority youth unemployment.

Prognosis

National employment is expected to undergo significant changes during the next decade. Bureau of Labor Statistics projections estimate the 1985 labor force to reach 103.4 million. However, during 1979, the nation's work force increased to 103 million. Although the BLS projection is obviously conservative, of greater importance are the higher projections for white collar employment as compared with blue collar employment. Both are expected to increase, but, blue collar employment will do so at a slower rate than previously. The outlook for farm workers remains bleak, with projections anticipating a 33 percent decline, from 3.2 percent in 1976 to less that 2 percent by 1985.[17]

These projected changes in occupational structure have their basis in long established trends of technological and social development. Of particular concern are the potential effects they will exert on the youth labor force. Youth unemployment during the 1980's will be largely dependent upon participation rates in occupations that are growing. Occupational projections indicate that growth in clerical, services, professional and technical, managerial and administrative occupations will be substanial during the next decade. The youth unemployment situation is likely to remain serious unless youth are adequately prepared to move into these white collar positions and offset the expected shift in occupational emphasis. More specifically, inner city blacks will experience the brunt of this youth unemployment problem. Practical solutions to

effectively deal with this potential dilemma demand the response of public policies concerned with youth occupational mobility.[18]

A large number of youths are presently in growth occupations. However, blacks suffer a disproportionate disadvantage compared with whites regarding employment in these occupations. Without some form of occupational upgrading, black youths, locked into slow-growing blue-collar occupations will suffer higher unemployment rates than will whites. Employment and training policies that fail to address the issue of the changing employment scene will adversely affect the structural nature of minority youth unemployment.

Black youth unemployment projections to 1985 reveal that one of every three teenagers and four of every ten unemployed adults will be black, thus indicating the necessity for expansion of employment opportunities for blacks. Of fundamental importance is the movement of blacks into high growth rate occupations.[19] Manpower policy directed at the potential black youth unemployment situation can help to offset the greater influx of young blacks into the labor force as a result of the later peak in their postwar baby population (See Figure 1).

The prospects for youth employment during the 1980's are dependent on numerous factors, some of the more obvious of which are:

> ...economic growth and the adult unemployment rate, the relative size of the adult labor force, the duration of education, the extent of competition for youth jobs from other labor force groups, the size of the military, and the ability of youth to move into occupations marked by above average growth.[20]

The level of the national unemployment rate will directly influence youth unemployment. BLS projections are based on a rate of 4.8 percent. If, as expected, the current rate of 6.2 percent persists or increases, the youth labor force, particularly blacks, will be more adversely affected.

Considering the projected emphasis on white collar occupations during the decade ahead, it appears evident that policies designed to alleviate the youth unemployment problem cannot rely completely on economic stimulation. Granted, economic policies do have a direct effect on the level of youth unemployment; however, they alone cannot eliminate the structural nature of the problem. Structural components are deeply rooted in factors such as age, ethnic origin, level of education, work experience (job skills), urban and rural labor market deterioration, and the national economy.

Dealing with the structural aspects of youth unemployment necessitates policy action designed to concentrate on those segments of the youth population having the greatest difficulty in the labor market. These structural problems do not effect all youth, and therefore, many young people do not require special attention. Those youth with chronic, lingering problems in the labor market are the ones in need of immediate attention. Approaching this targeted segment with localized, individualized programs is a practical means to identify and meet their future labor market needs.

Urban Youth Employment Perspectives

The urban employment situation in the U.S. reflects an insufficient supply and class of jobs able to provide worthwhile income earning opportunities. In general, urban America is experiencing a limited amount of economic resources to adequately deal with the problems of unemployment. The changing urban economic base is the result of:

1. Outmigration from central cities. This trend has developed due to slower urban economic growth and the rapid development of suburban America since World War II.

2. Population composition changes. The population change is characterized primarily by white out-migration to the suburbs and nonmetropolitan areas, and black and Hispanic in-migration to central cities.

3. Reduction in job supply. The 1960's experienced the large-scale decentralization of manufacturing throughout America. Large companies moved away from central cities for economic reasons, leaving ubran areas with significant reductions in employment opportunities.[21]

Central cities experienced higher unemployment rates than suburban areas. Minority and youth populations experience the worst of this higher unemployment (Table 2).

Table 2
Unemployment Rates for Selected Civilian Noninstitutional Population Segments in Metropolitan Areas
Annual Averages 1976-77

Unemployed Segment	Central Cities		Suburbs	
	1976	1977	1976	1977
Total Labor Force	9.2	8.7	7.1	6.3
Age 16 to 19 (both sexes)	23.4	22.7	17.9	16.0
White	7.9	7.0	6.8	6.0
Black and other	13.9	14.5	11.8	10.8

Source: Employment and Training Report of the President (1978) Table A-9, p. 196.

The employment situation for urban teenage youth is an unfortunate one. The problem for blacks is particularly bad. In 1977, more than 60 percent of all unemployed black teenagers were located in urban areas, compared with 23 percent for whites.[22] The disparity between black and white job availability can be traced to a lack of adequate credentials, educational deficiencies, racial discrimination, and employer attitudes placing minorities at a distinct disadvantage. Employment opportunities for all urban youth focus on "part-time, low-paying jobs emanating from low-status industries and occupations."[23]

They concentrate in occupations with traditionally high unemployment rates like service, sales, clerical, wholesale and retail.

Considering all of the above factors, it is obvious that the nature of urban youth unemployment has an inherent structural component, not able to be solved solely by implementing monetary and fiscal policies. The problem goes much deeper than mere provision of employment opportunities. There is a need for in-depth analysis of those individuals comprising the unemployment statistics. An understanding of the cultural and economic factors that determine why patterns of employment are different for central city youth, and the reasons these youth are less committed to a work ethic is imperative.

Given the current urban youth unemployment situation, the prognosis for the future will be a bleak one if employment and training programs fail to combine monetary and fiscal policy with practical approaches to solve the underlying structural nature of urban youth unemployment. With many urban areas experiencing greater financial constraints, due to the continuing erosion of their economic base (e.g., New York and Cleveland being the most publicized instances), the solutions to youth unemployment problems may, out of necessity, fall on the shoulders of the federal government. Major metropolitan areas alone will not be able to successfully cope with the problem.

Urban youth unemployment cannot be dealt with effectively by across-the-board legislation providing equal assistance to all urban areas and all urban youth. Critical structural unemployment is not a problem with all urban areas nor is it a problem with all urban youth. The most crucial programs, from a structural unemployment perspective, are those designed to identify problems of the population in greatest need. This will facilitate implementation of programs to help alleviate those problems.

Rural Youth Employment Perspectives

One of the problems of employment and training policy legislation is its centrality in attempting to reduce levels of youth unemployment. It inadvertently assumes problems associated with youth unemployment are universal and can therefore be categorically assembled under one heading. Unfortunately, the situation is not this simple. There are regional, economic, social, and cultural differences warranting consideration. The preceding discussion points out some of these differences relevant to urban areas. By contrast, rural youth exhibit characteristics distinct from urban youth that demand their own consideration with regard to the problems of youth unemployment.

Rural and urban areas exhibit different characteristics that can have significance in the implementation of employment and training programs. Most urban poor families lack a male figure as head of household, whereas most rural poor families are headed by men and are more inclinded to be two parent families. To a greater extent than rural poor, urban poor families are likely to be welfare recipients.[24] Although rural unemployment statistics are lower than those for urban areas, the nonfarm segment of the rural teenage population experiences consistently higher rates of unemployment than does the farm segment (Table 3).

Table 3
Unemployment Rates for Selected Civilian Noninstitutional Population Segments in Nonmetropolitan Areas
Annual Averages 1976-77

Unemployed Segment	Nonmetropolitan Areas					
	Total		Farm		Nonfarm	
	1976	1977	1976	1977	1976	1977
Total labor force	7.0	6.6	2.6	2.6	7.5	7.0
Ages 16 to 19 (both sexes)	16.8	16.3	6.3	6.9	18.2	17.4
White	6.5	6.1	2.4	2.4	7.0	6.5
Black and other	12.7	12.1	6.1	6.6	13.1	12.5

Source: Employment and Training Report of the President (1978) Table A-9, p. 196.

Since World War II, the large-scale mechanization of farming has resulted in reduced demand for farm labor in rural areas. This decrease in demand has created numerous employment problems for three reasons:

1. It involved large numbers of people,
2. The displaced farm labor supply lacked adequate job skills to make a successful transition to nonfarm occupations,
3. Many employment opportunities were geographically separated from those needing employment.[25]

The large-scale decentralization of manufacturing during the 1960's and early 1970's provided some help in increasing the demand for labor, but those benfitting from these job opportunities were often migrants with metropolitan backgrounds who offered more in the way of industrial job skills than the unemployed rural labor supply. Without an expanding job market designed to specifically meet rural needs, the rural labor force can expect continued depressed labor demands in the years ahead. Not all young people can, or desire to, take over family farms. Neither can they all fill jobs their parents fill. Therefore, without sufficient opportunities, young people will have to relocate to obtain gainful employment.

Rural youth unemployment problems are often different from those of urban youth. They generally are not poverty-related but instead emanate from the institutions which are characteristic of rural communities.[26] Rural schools appear to be one source of the problem. They are often small with insufficient and inadequate staff. They are unable or unwilling to provide youth with adjustment skills and experiences for transition to the modern labor market. In addition, employment and training programs available to rural areas have an inherent urban bias. For example, "disadvantaged" has a different connotation in rural areas; however eligibility for participation in employment and training programs is based on the urban definition of disadvantaged. To overcome these institutional

drawbacks localized programs designed for individualized attention are needed. Establishing flexibility in program regulations is required to bring this goal to fruition.

Reviewing the trends of the 60's and 70's makes it possible to speculate about the prospects for youth employment during the decade ahead. The reverse migration trend will continue to bring more people to rural areas. Industrial decentralization will continue to increase the demand for a semi-skilled, and white collar labor force. Finally, development of alternative sources of energy (e.g., coal), will directly affect rural sectors of the nation due to the location of available natural resources in rural areas. This suggests that the prognosis for youth employment in rural areas is brighter than that for urban youth. However, if rural youth continue to remain deficient in adequate job and educational skills required in the modern labor market, the lack of sufficient employment opportunities will continue to plague this segment of the labor force. The potential is there. Successful development of that potential needs to be accomplished by linking employment and training programs with educational components to successfully develop the future employability of America's rural youth.

Conclusions

The foregoing discussion attempts to develop an awareness of the issues of youth employment from a national perspective. The major characteristics and causes discussed in the literature are presented in a descriptive and somewhat condensed narrative. Although presentation of pertinent issues is the primary intent of this report, there are relevant conclusions that can be drawn based on this descriptive material.

1. The youth population of the 1980's is projected to decline. The last of the postwar baby boom population will pass through their teens in 1981. Many people assume that the youth unemployment problem will also decrease. Even though the problem will appear less visible, the real problem will increase for blacks because their baby boom cohort will peak in 1985 and drop off much more slowly than that of whites. Failing to give due consideration to this fact could result in a worsening of the structural nature of the minority youth unemployment problem.

2. The causes attributed with youth unemployment are diverse and multifacted. No one factor can explain the reasons for high unemployment rates. A variety of social, economic, cultural, demographic, and environmental factors warrant attention in determining causes. By the same token, these factors must be considered in the development of programs designed to help alleviate the structural nature of youth unemployment.

3. Our educational system is rigidly structured and serves as a deterent to an increasing number of young people. Insufficient alternatives exist to meet the diverse needs of the younger population. An educational system cannot survive in a rapidly changing culture if it fails to adapt to that change. Establishing a more flexible educational system,

designed to provide individualized program development and instruction, can help in this adaption. For example, the Carnegie Report advocates a career education approach starting in elementary school that would provide youth the opportunity to explore different vocational and occupational avenues at an early age.

The emphasis on education should remain fairly high, for research indicates a positive correlation with the level of educational attainment and income and employment potential. What requires consideration is the need to provide youth with alternatives to the traditional form of classroom education.

4. Minority, inner city, and rural area youth are the segments of the labor force that will experience the bulk of youth unemployment during the 1980's. By applying efforts to lessen their structural unemployment problems, employment and training programs can help to maximize the financial and social costs involved. Elimination of the structural component will not occur overnight. Nevertheless, if something is not done to slow its progress, the situation will surely become worse during that time.

Different programs are not necessarily required for urban and rural area youth. Rather, a flexible national manpower policy, which permits the development of localized and individualized programs, can facilitate the accomplishment of this objective. A flexible national policy can allow for targeting on distressed segments of the population, determining and evaluating the needs of that population segment, and developing programs to effectively meet those needs.

Evaluation of numerous past and current employment and training programs has fostered a more comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of the youth unemployment dilemma. At the present time, it is necessary to take a critical look at the types of legislation and programs needed for the future. This, coupled with a commitment from local areas to deal with this problem, is the key to successfully addressing the issues of youth employment.

NOTES

1. Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, Giving Youth a Better Chance: Options for Education, Work, and Service, Washington, DC: Jossey Bass, 1979, p. 34.

2. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "The Employment Situation: January, 1980", NEWS, Tables A-2 and A-6, 1980.

3. Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, figure 10, p. 42.

4. Osterman, Paul, "Understanding Youth Employment" in Annual Additions, Reading in Economics 79/80, Guilford, CT: Dushkin Publishing Group, Inc., 1979, pp. 92-96.

5. Contrary to this position, the U.S. Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics has recently (Feb. 1980) published a career guidebook (Exploring Careers) for young people in their early teens. It is based on the assumption that junior high students are ready to think about careers.

6. Osterman, p. 92.

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10. Adams and Mangum pp. 26-28.

11. Employment and Training Report of the President, 1978, pp. 74-75, Prepared by U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration.

12. Adams and Mangum pp. 66-68.

13. Ibid, p. 115.

14. Employment and Training Report of the President, p. 75.

15. Ibid.

16. Osterman, p. 94.

17. Adams and Mangum, p. 51. This reference serves as the primary source of information for the Prognosis section of this report.

18. Ibid, p. 52.

19. Ibid, p. 58.

20. Ibid, p. 62.

21. Anderson, Bernard E., "Manpower Policy Goals for Urban America", in Directions for a National Manpower Policy: A Collection of Policy Papers Prepared for Three Regional Conferences. A Special Report of the National Commission for Manpower Policy, No. 14, December 1976, pp. 27-40.

22. Mangum and Walsh, p. 29.

23. Ibid.

24. Marshall, Ray F., "Manpower and Rural-Urban Balance" in Directions for a National Manpower Policy: A Collection of Policy Papers Prepared for Three Regional Conferences. A Special Report of the National Commission for Manpower Policy, No. 14, December 1976, pp. 43-64.

25. U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (Leonardson, Gene S. and David M. Nelson) Rural Oriental Research and Development Projects: A Review and Synthesis, R & D Monograph 50, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977, p. 9.

26. Ibid, p. 112.

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